



Gender equality and quality of life –
how gender equality can contribute
to development in Europe.
A study of Poland and Norway

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Gender Equality in Public Life in Poland

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1. Introduction

Women's activity in public life is an area of gender equality and one of the criteria for participatory (or broad) democracy, where not only are formal citizens' rights assured, but also the actual public participation of different social groups is guaranteed (see Walby 2009). Therefore, the proportion of women in different public bodies is included in the pool of indicators of the level of gender equality, as in the Global Gender Gap Report (2013) of the World Economic Forum, as well as social development, as in the Human Development Report (2014) of the United Nations.

In Poland, as in most countries, women and men are constitutionally granted equal civil rights, including the right to vote, the right to be elected, the right to hold public office, as well as the right to associate and to petition. However, in Poland – as in many democratic countries – women are far less represented in political and public institutions than men, which suggests that their actual equal participation is not – so far – guaranteed. As far as the “political empowerment” sub-index of the Global Gender Gap Index is concerned, in 2013 Poland was ranked 49 out of 134 classified countries.

Indicators of women's presence in public life are included in a variety of macro-level rankings which allow countries to be compared and contrasted and the progress, stagnation or regress on their route to gender equality, social development and participatory democracy to be monitored. However, many such indices are very abstract and say nothing directly about the quality of life of ordinary people. Are men and women more satisfied with their lives in countries where participation in public life is more gender-balanced than in countries where men heavily dominate in this area? Do citizens experience betterment in their private lives when the public sphere is increasingly “women-friendly”? And generally, how does “big” politics and its parameters influence individual experiences of everyday life? In order to answer these questions it is important first to: 1. make an effort to conceptualise “gender equality” in public life, 2. analyse possible linkages between gender equality in public life and the quality of life of ordinary people (both men and women), 3. outline the context of gender equality in a country/countries taken into consideration.

2. The meaning of gender equality in public life

Our interest concerns gender relations in public life, which is a part of social life, with its locus between the micro-level of households and the macro-level of the nation-state (Wnuk-Lipiński 2008). Public life encompasses political and civic participation.

Political participation will be understood here as encompassing “activities aimed at influencing government policy or affecting the selection of public officials” (Zukin et al. 2006: 51). Among these activities are: voting in national, local, supra-national (e.g. European) elections and in referenda, standing for election, holding political positions (as an MP, president, prime minister, member of government, president or mayor of a city, village mayor (*wójt*), village administrator (*sołtys*), member of a local or regional council), being a member of a political party, volunteering to work for a political organisation, attending campaign meetings, contacting political representatives (local MPs, local-government representatives), contacting the media on public issues, writing and signing petitions, organising and taking part in protest politics (demonstrations, marches, boycotts, etc.; cf. Dalton 1996; Putnam 2000).

Civic participation will mean “participation aimed at achieving a public good, but usually through direct hands-on work in cooperation with others” (Zukin et al. 2006: 51). This participation includes: membership and active involvement in associations (professional, trade unions, religious, sport, cultural, hobby, youth, women’s, etc.), activity in social movements (environmental, animal-rights, feminist, pacifist, alter-globalist, anti-ACTA, fair-trade, slow-food, anti-abortion, nationalistic, etc.), involvement in local projects and groups (parental committees in schools, church choirs, etc.), volunteering, and neighbourhood networks (cf. Putnam 1993, 2000).

The distinction between political and civic participation is mostly analytical, as the boundaries between these two types of engagement in public life are not always clear. “While civic engagement occurs largely outside the domains of elected officials and government action, it can have important consequences for matters with which the government is also concerned (for example, public safety, homelessness, education, even national security). And since civic engagement often pertains to public matters and not solely to private questions, government may not be directly involved but may serve as arbiter, facilitator, supporter or enforcer of decisions and activities in the civic realm” (Zukin et al. 2006: 52).

Besides political and civic participation there is at least one more way of engaging in the public life of one's country or community. This is cognitive engagement, understood as paying attention to politics and public affairs. It encompasses such activities as being interested in public affairs, following the news in the media and discussing public affairs with family and friends (Zukin et al. 2006: 54).¹

How can gender equality in public life therefore be understood? Let us look at the possible answers:

- There are legal and institutional guarantees of equal rights for women and men to participate in public life.
- There are provisions aiming at attaining gender balance in political representation and decision making (Galligan, Clavero 2008a).
- Women and men have equal opportunities to become active in public life (this assumes that they have equal access to the resources necessary to take up activities) (OECD 2014; World Development Report 2012).
- There is gender balance among candidates for holding political and public offices (Moser 2007).
- There is balanced representation of women and men in political and public institutions (e.g. parliament, government, ministries, local councils etc.) (OECD 2014).
- There is gender balance among members of associations, trade unions, political parties, etc. (OECD 2014).
- As many women as men hold leadership positions in political and non-governmental organisations (OECD 2014; World Development Report 2012).
- Women and men are equally active in non-institutionalised politics: protest politics, local initiatives, social movements, etc. (World Development Report 2012).
- Women and men are equally effective in public life (Oxfam 2002, World Development Report 2012).

¹ Zukin et al. distinguish another type of public engagement, which is "public voice", understood as the "ways the citizens give expression to their views on public issues" and including signing petitions, engaging in e-mail campaigns, starting or contributing to political blogs and writing letters to editors (Zukin et al. 2006: 54). As many other activities include expression of views or preferences (e.g. voting, party membership, joining environmental associations, etc.) and it is often difficult to separate the simple expression of someone's views from the intention of influencing the political process or public affairs (as in the case of petitioning for passing a law on gender quotas or writing a letter to a local newspaper concerning the difficult situation of senior citizens in order to influence public opinion, get the media interested in the topic or even influence policy makers to find a systemic solution), distinguishing such a category seems to be dispensable in this analysis.

- Formal political institutions are equally accessible to women's and men's civil society organisations seeking to influence decision making.
- "Women's issues" and "men's issues" are treated equally by political and public institutions (Inter-Parliamentary Union 1994).
- People think that women and men are equal in public life.

The indices used by global organisations to estimate the overall levels of gender equality or social development include only selected quantitative measures of gender equality in public life. These are: the ratio of women to men in minister-level positions (Global Gender Gap Report 2013, Women and men ... 2013), the ratio of women to men in parliamentary positions (Global Gender Gap 2013, Human Development Report 2014, Women and men ... 2013), the ratio of women to men in terms of years in executive office (president or prime minister) for the last 50 years (Global Gender Gap 2013), the share of female leaders of major political parties (Women and men ... 2013), the percentage of women in local councils, regional assemblies and supra-national organisations, such as bodies of the European Union (Women and men ... 2013).

3. Gender equality in public life and quality of life

Why should ratios of women to men in public life be taken into consideration when we estimate the level of social development, and especially when we want to find correlates of the quality of life of individuals? This becomes understandable when we realise that unequal access to the political and civic realms means that "half the population might be denied effective citizenship because of gender" (Walby 1994: 391) as "...political exclusion of women restricts women's voice and ability to shape the laws and policies that affect their lives" (Human Development Report 2014: 23).

While all laws and policies influence the lives of ordinary people directly or indirectly, a considerable number of these rules and regulations are concerned with "women's issues".² Evident examples of these concerns include working conditions in professions dominated by women (nursing, primary and high school teaching, textiles industry), general working conditions for women (including protection of the workplace for women returning from

² As the notion of "women's interests" remains controversial (what they are and who should define them), scholars have identified "women's issues", which can be understood as issues that include policies increasing women's autonomy and well-being (Krook, Childs 2010: 10).

maternity leave), arrangements of maternity leave and payments in support of dependants, public infrastructure for small children (day nurseries, kindergartens), regulation of abortion and in vitro fertilisation, penalisation of violence against women, discussion on the equal status act and facilitation of women's participation in representative institutions. There is some evidence showing that "legislatures with higher proportions of women tend to introduce and pass more bills on women issues than their counterparts in low representation legislatures" (quoted in Krook, Childs 2010: 10-11).³ Articulation of claims and taking steps to represent women's issues may also be initiated by women representing social movements, political parties and state institutions. However, when women do not constitute a social group that is publicly audible and influential in the decision process their demands may be easily neglected and their ideas ignored, or at best continuously postponed as unrealistic or harmful.

The recent history of public debate and the decision process in Poland is larded with examples of neglect and ideologisation of women's issues, including political battles over the anti-abortion law,⁴ regulation of in vitro fertilisation, quotas on electoral lists, the office of the Plenipotentiary for Equal Status, the law on gender equal opportunities⁵ and ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence as well as the decision to scrap the Alimony Fund and the lack of political will to improve working conditions of nurses and midwives employed in public hospitals and clinics. However, a few cases of successful efforts to enforce woman-friendly policies prove that women acting together outside the political system can be effective. A quota system obliging all political parties to include at least 35% of women and men in the lists of candidates for parliamentary (including European Parliament) and local-governmental elections was introduced in 2011 through a citizens' legislative initiative coordinated by a women's

³ However, the answer to the question of the critical mass – whether an increase in women's presence in governmental and legislative bodies and, if yes, to what proportion, influences adoption of women-friendly policies – remains unsolved (Krook, Childs 2010).

⁴ The women's rights activist and expert in anti-discriminatory law Eleonora Zielińska (2000: 53) stresses that "the legal battle over abortion is a highly politicized process that serves interests perceived to be far greater than those of enhancing women's control of their fertility. Although the battle is waged in a democratically elected Parliament, in Poland, democracy remains 'democracy with a male face'".

⁵ In spite of directives from the European Union, the equal status act has not been passed for many years. Consecutive Plenipotentiaries for Equal Legal Status worked on the bill and attempted to make the parliament pass it, but without success. It was only December 2010 when the bill – prepared by the first government of Prime Minister Donald Tusk – was finally passed. However, it is strongly criticised by many NGOs – including feminist activists – as a step backward in comparison to the previous projects. It is perceived as the minimal answer to the EU accusation of not implementing its directives neglecting many issues of the broad problem of discrimination. Among many problems, members of NGOs criticise the act for including a limited and closed list of features (including gender, age, ethnicity, religion) that should not be the cause of discrimination, and for defining discrimination too narrowly (e.g. the stance of the Polish Society of Anti-Discrimination Law, <http://www.ptpa.org.pl/koalicia>, 28.09.2014).

movement and the “Women’s Congress” association. Similarly, the Alimony Fund for single parents (mainly mothers), scrapped in 2004, was restored in 2008 as a result of protests and a legislative initiative coordinated by mobilised independent mothers. Although in both cases the success was partial – as some of the provisions of the initial citizens’ bills were changed or rejected during parliamentary debates⁶ – this nevertheless confirms that in Poland “autonomous women’s movements can improve the representation of women in the policy process” (Weldon 2010: 234).

Apart from the fact that women active in political institutions and non-governmental bodies can shape and influence the political debate and the decision process, activity for the public good can enhance one’s comfort, make individuals feel necessary, and help to satisfy the need for belonging and esteem.

The importance of gender equality in public life is recognised in the notion of women’s empowerment, which refers to “the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability” (Kabeer 1999: 1). The ability to make choices incorporates three inter-related dimensions including “resources”, “agency” and “achievements”. While “resources” may encompass the indices of education attainment, standard of living and life expectancy, the “agency” domain can be operationalised in terms of public activism. It is emphasised that “activity in public life, especially actions that express group demands, empowers women by creating opportunities to shape the agendas of their societies” (Alexander, Welzel 2011: 368). Additionally, among the indices of “achievements”, women’s representation in political decision-making positions may be included (Alexander, Welzel 2011).

Let us now consider the context of gender (in)equality in public life in contemporary Poland. The notion of the context shall encompass two interrelated groups of indicators, namely 1. data on the ratios of women to men participating in institutionalised and non-institutionalised politics and forms of civic life and 2. factors influencing gender (in)equality in public life. Among the latter, the role of structural, cultural and institutional factors will be discussed.

⁶ The citizens’ bill on quotas included the mechanism of parity, but this was changed to a quota of 35%. The citizens’ bill on restoration of the Alimony Fund was replaced with a governmental bill which considerably limited the number of eligible families (for more details on the Congress of Women and the movement for the restoration of the alimony fund see: Korolczuk 2014).

4. The context of gender (in)equality in public life in Poland

Gender (in)equality in institutionalised politics in Poland

Beginning with the most common form of political participation in a contemporary democracy – namely voting – we should note that voter turnouts in parliamentary elections for the last 25 years have been lower in Poland than in many democratic countries, including other Central and Eastern European states. The highest voter turnout was observed in the semi-free election of 1989, reaching 62%. In the following, fully democratic elections it did not exceed 54%. According to declarations made by respondents, more men voted in parliamentary elections than women. However, the differences between sexes varied from 12% in the case of the 1993 election to only 1% in the 2005 election (Sekuła 2010).⁷ The differences in voter turnouts between men and women were proved to be statistically significant in 1989, 1991, 1993 and again in 2007 (Kunovich 2012).

Table 1. Proportions of women in the Polish legislature

Year of election	1985 ¹	1989 ²	1991	1993	1997	2001	2005	2007	2011
% of female MPs in Sejm ³	20.2	13.5	9.6	13.0	13.0	20.2	20.4	20.0	23.9
% of female MPs in Senate ⁴	-	6	8	13	12	23	13	8	15

¹ The year of the last communist election in Poland.

² The 1989 election in Poland was partly free.

³ The Sejm is the lower chamber of the Polish parliament.

⁴ The Senate is the upper chamber of the Polish parliament, established in 1989.

In Poland, as in other post-communist European societies, women's presence in the national legislative body visibly shrank after the institutional change initiated in 1989 by the dismantlement of communism and the first semi-free election. While the parliament – a democratic façade during communism – was regaining its real legislative power, the percentage of women in political representation was falling (Fuszara 2011). After a further decrease in the proportions of female MPs following the parliamentary election in 1991, however, the tendency reversed later on: nowadays, women constitute almost a quarter of the deputies in the upper chamber of the Polish parliament (see Table 1). The most considerable increase – by 7% – was attained in 2001 due to the adoption of voluntary quotas

⁷ The actual differences may differ, as the level of participation in parliamentary elections declared by respondents was always considerably higher than the real voter turnouts.

by a few political parties,⁸ the increased sizes of electoral districts⁹ and the high level of women's mobilisation.¹⁰ A further increase by almost 4% in the 2011 parliamentary election was a direct consequence of the law on quotas on electoral lists in the elections to local councils, to the Sejm and to the European Parliament, which was introduced early that year. The law stipulates that the number of candidates of either gender on the electoral lists may not be lower than 35% of the overall number of candidates on this list.

In the case of local and regional legislatures – including the *gmina* council, city council, *powiat* council and voivodeship regional council – a slow but steady growth of female elected politicians can be observed (see Table 2).¹¹ As the election planned for autumn 2014 will be the first self-governmental election held after the introduction of the obligatory quotas, a further increase in female councillors can be expected.¹² The presence of women among local executives, however, remains rather symbolic. After the 2010 election there were only 9% of women among wójt's, mayors and presidents of cities. Since 2002, when the first direct elections for these posts were held, the proportion of female executives had risen by only 2 percentage points (see Table 2).

Table 2. Proportions of women in local governmental bodies

	% of women in different local governmental elective bodies					
	1990	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010
Gmina council	11	13	16	18	21	25
City council ¹	-	-	20	23	23	24
Powiat council	-	-	15	16	17	18
Voivodeship council	-	-	11	14	18	23
Wójt's, mayors and presidents of city	-	-	-	7	8	9

¹ City councils operate in large cities with powiat status.

Source: Own compilation on the basis of: M. Fuszara 2007, *Kobiety w Polsce 2007*, Kandydatki 2011.

⁸ The Democratic Left Alliance, Labour Union and Liberty Union introduced the rule of minimum 30 percent women on electoral lists (Fuszara 2007).

⁹ It has been confirmed that in larger, multi-member districts women tend to secure a larger share of seats than elsewhere (Norris 2006)

¹⁰ Before the 2001 parliamentary election the Pre-election Women's Coalition was established, which coordinated a campaign to promote female candidates.

¹¹ The first election to gmina councils was held in 1990. In 1998 two upper levels of local government were introduced – powiat and voivodeship.

¹² However, the scope of this increase will probably not be significant, as in the 2010 election there were already around 30% of female candidates to all of the local-governmental legislatures. Yet, the proportion of female candidates to the local-governmental legislatures rose to 38% in 2014. As of April 2015 sex-disaggregated data on the results of the 2014 election were not available.

As with the local level, women's access to executive power at national level in Poland had long been rather sporadic; recently, though, there have been signs of change. Women were almost totally absent from the bodies that held the real power in communism, that is the top management of the communist party (Fuszara 2011; Forest 2011).¹³ After the systemic transformation began there was little change. Although a woman was appointed to the post of prime minister in the early 1990s, the temporary character of her power and the way she was recalled show that a female prime minister was an exception "rather than part of a trend towards the acceptance of women in high office" (LaFont 2001: 6).¹⁴ The appointment of the second female prime minister, Ewa Kopacz, in September 2014, after the previous male head of government became the president of the European Council and only a year before the next parliamentary election which will "naturally" interrupt the government's term, suggests that not much has changed in terms of acceptance of women in the top executive office.

As far as the office of the President of the Republic of Poland is concerned, its gendered nature is even more evident. Not only have there been no women among the four presidents chosen in popular elections since 1990, but also female candidates to this post have been rare and not gained significant support. In five consecutive presidential elections (1990, 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010), there were 61 candidates including two women, receiving 3% and 1% respectively of the popular votes.¹⁵

Table 3. Female ministers in Polish cabinets since 1989

Prime minister	Term	Cabinet	No. of ministers ¹	Female ministers ²
Tadeusz Mazowiecki	07.1989-11.1990	Centre-right	23	1 (4.3%)
Jan K. Bielecki	01-12.1991	Centre-right	19	0 (0%) ³
Jan Olszewski	12.1991-06.1992	Right	20	0 (0%)
Waldemar Pawlak	06-07.1992	Centre-right	20	0 (0%)
Hanna Suchocka	07.1992-10.1993	Centre-right	22	0 (0%)

¹³ Women were appointed to governmental offices in some communist regimes, but the executive became disempowered in the early 1950s for the benefit of the monopolist parties' structures (Forest 2011).

¹⁴ Hanna Suchocka was appointed to the post in July 1992 after a male candidate failed to gain support from parliament. Attacked from both the left and the right of the political scene as well as challenged by the troubled economic situation and mass protests, Suchocka's cabinet collapsed after 10 months as a result of a vote of non-confidence inspired by one of the parties that had earlier supported her appointment (<http://kalendarium.polska.pl/wydarzenia/article.htm?id=82756>, 13.08.2001).

¹⁵ These were Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz (2.76% of votes), who stood for election in 1995, and Henryka Bochniarz (1.26%), a candidate in 2005.

Waldemar Pawlak	10.1993-03.1995	Centre-left	18	1 (5.5%)
Józef Oleksy	03.1995-01.1996	Centre-left	19	1 (5.3%)
Waldemar Cimoszewicz	02.1996-10.1997	Centre-left	19	1 (5.3%) ⁴
Jerzy Buzek	10.1997-10.2001	Centre-right	21	3 (14.3%) ⁵
Leszek Miller	10.2001-05.2004	Centre-left	16	2 (12.5%) ⁶
Marek Belka	05.2004	Expert-left	16	1 (6.2%)
Marek Belka	06.2004-10.2005	Expert-left	16	1 (6.2%)
Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz	10.2005-07.2006	Right	20	2 (10.0%) ⁷
Jarosław Kaczyński	07.2006-11.2007	Right-populist	21	3 (14.3%) ⁸
Donald Tusk	11.2007-11.2011	Centre-right	18	5 (27.7%) ⁹
Donald Tusk	11.2011-09.2014	Centre-right	19	4 (21.0%)
Ewa Kopacz	09.2014-	Centre-right	18	5 (27.7%)

¹ Numbers of ministers when the government was appointed.

² Numbers and proportions of female ministers when the government was appointed.

³ In Bielecki's government a female minister was appointed later on.

⁴ After the reconstruction of Cimoszewicz's cabinet there were no female ministers.

⁵ At the end of Buzek's cabinet term there were two female ministers.

⁶ At the end of Miller's cabinet term there was only one female minister.

⁷ At the end of Marcinkiewicz's cabinet term there were three female ministers.

⁸ At the end of Kaczyński's cabinet term there were five female ministers.

⁹ At the end of Tusk's cabinet term there were four female ministers

Source: own calculation on the basis of http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sk%C5%82ady_rz%C4%85d%C3%B3w_polskich#Rz.C4.85dy_III_Rzeczypospolitej_.28od_1989.29, 4.10.2014.

For the last 25 years, women have been almost absent in the top political leadership positions in Poland. Recently, however, they have more often been present in other high-ranking offices, including as deputy prime ministers and ministers. While in the 1990s and at the beginning of the 21st century no women held the office of deputy prime minister, in the last 10 years there have been three: Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka in Marek Belka's minority expert cabinet, in office between May 2004 and October 2005, Zyta Gilowska in Jarosław Kaczyński's coalitional government, in office between January 2006 and November 2007, and Elżbieta Bieńkowska in Donald Tusk's second cabinet, in office between November 2013 and September 2014. Similarly, while in consecutive governments operating until 1997 there was at most one female minister, nowadays four or five ministries headed by women is becoming

the standard. The current cabinet appointed in September 2014 is the most “women-friendly”, with a female prime minister and almost 28% female ministers (see Table 3).

Women and men in non-institutionalised forms of political participation

In the last 25 years, the level of participation in non-institutionalised forms of political activity in Poland, including signing petitions, joining in boycotts, attending peaceful demonstrations and joining strikes, has remained low in comparison to many well-established democracies (Inglehart, Catterberg 2002; WVS 2010-2014). According to the World Values Survey (WVS), signing petitions was the most popular activity among both women and men; however, larger proportions of women than men admitted to doing this in 1997 and 2012. At the same time, larger proportions of men than women declared that they joined peaceful demonstrations, strikes and boycotts. In neither case, however, were the discrepancies between sexes larger than 7% (see Table 4).

Table 4. Women and men in non-institutionalised political activities

Form of activity	1997		2012	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Signing petitions (% of “have done”)	19	22	29	33
Attending peaceful demonstrations (% of “have done”)	13	6	9	7
Joining strikes (% of “have done”)	7	2	8	4
Joining in boycotts (% of “have done”)	7	4	5	3

Source: WVS 1989-2014.

Membership in civic organisations and activity in communities

Since the early 1990s, membership in voluntary associations has remained at a low level in Poland. In 2013, around 14% of Poles declared membership in organisations, associations, parties, committees, councils, religious groups or clubs. The difference in the degree of participation in organisations between men and women was small: 14.3% compared to 13.1%. While men more often joined sports clubs, political parties, interest clubs, consumers’ organisations and elected local authorities, women prevailed in social and religious clubs, self-help groups, organisations that broadcast information and parents’ committees (Czapiński, Panek 2013).

Although the level of party membership was similar for both sexes,¹⁶ women have been marginally present in the leaderships of the Polish political parties for the last 25 years.

¹⁶ 3.3% of women and 5.2% of men declared membership in political parties in 2012 (WVS 2010-2014).

In the past, women chaired only two parties – the Democratic Union (2009-2012) and Labour Union (2004-2005). Additionally, in December 2014 Ewa Kopacz is due to be appointed as the temporary president of the governing Civic Platform after its current leader resigns to take the office of president of the European Council.¹⁷ Moreover, in the boards of the biggest Polish political parties women constituted around 20% in 2011 (cf. Druciarek, Fuszara, Niżyńska, Zbieranek 2012).

Initiating or joining activities for the benefit of one's own community remained almost as rare as membership in organisations, and was declared by around 15% of Poles in 2013. Men were more likely to get involved in local initiatives than women (16.7% compared to 13.9%). Doing unpaid work or services for persons outside the family or for a social organisation was only slightly more popular, as almost 20% Poles admitted to performing this kind of activity, including 22.6% of men and 16.9% of women (Czapiński, Panek 2013).

Cognitive engagement in public life

The biggest differences between the sexes in engagement in public life can be observed at the level of cognitive engagement. Considerably more men than women declared a personal interest in politics, admitted that politics was important in their lives and discussed political matters (compare Table 5).¹⁸ Additionally, more men than women felt that among Polish political parties there was one which they considered to be close to them. In 2013, 32% of men and 19% of women made such a declaration.¹⁹ At the same time, 38% of women and 29% of men declared that none of the existing political parties best expressed their opinions, interests and expectations (CBOS 2013). Additionally, 28% of women compared to 17% of men were not able to characterise their political views on the left-right spectrum. These results suggest that the level of political alienation is higher among women than among men.

¹⁷ Since 2007, the Women's Party, headed by consecutive female chairs, has been functioning on the Polish political scene. It has not had any electoral success so far. Additionally, the Green Party, operating in Poland since 2003, has female and male co-chairs.

¹⁸ In 2012, 8% of women and 16% of men described their interest in politics as "large" and "very large", and 42% of women and 51% of men as "medium". Simultaneously, 16% of women and 27% of men discussed political matters very frequently and frequently, whereas 39% of women and 28% of men practically did not discuss political matters. While women discussed political matters with their family members (68% versus 41% of men), mainly men, men discussed mainly with male friends (51% versus 33% of women). Among people declaring that there was someone whose political stance was important for them, women pointed to their husbands or other men, and men pointed to other male family members (CBOS 2013).

¹⁹ The percentage of declarations that there was a political party that was close to respondents has been falling since at least 1998, when 53% of women and 60% of men declared this (CBOS 2013).

Table 5. Sex differences in cognitive engagement in politics

	1989		1990		1997		2005		2010	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Interest in politics ¹	38	60	35	65	35	50	36	45	32	53
Importance in life: politics ²	40	44	28	46	27	45	28	30	28	39
Discuss political matters ³	20	30	18	28	13	23	-	-	-	-

¹ % of combined answers: “very interested” and “somewhat interested”

² % of combined answers: “very important” and “rather important”

³ % of answers: “frequently”

Source: own calculation on the basis of WVS (<http://www.worldvaluessurvey.com>).

Enclaves of women’s public activity?

The data presented above demonstrates that for the last 25 years there have been considerable differences between men and women in engagement in Polish public life. There have been larger proportions of men than women among voters, members of organisations, protesters, and people interested in politics. Neither in the national parliament nor in regional and local councils do women constitute 30%, a commonly recognised minimum representation enabling the members of a minority group to make a substantial difference in politics (cf. Dahlerup 2006).²⁰ Excluding the latest changes in the proportions of female ministers, women’s presence in top executive offices has been even more marginal.

There are, however, at least two enclaves of public activity where women are more visible. One of them is the office of *sołtys* (village administrator), who is the elected head of the rural subdivision of the gmina, an auxiliary unit of the gmina (usually a village, or part of a large village) known as a *sołectwo*. The considerable proportion of women among village administrators was signalled in 2005, but due to the lack of official cumulative statistical data, the exact scope of this phenomenon could not be verified at the time (Fuszara 2005). Relevant data was first published in 2010, according to which 30% of village administrators were female. This proportion rose to 35% in 2013 (Statistical Yearbook of the Regions. Poland 2010, 2013).²¹

²⁰ The concept of a critical mass – borrowed from nuclear physics, where it refers to the quantity needed to start a chain reaction – suggests “that while small minorities of those who were different were unlikely to be able to affect organizational culture, once they reached a level of around 30% things would change”. Despite a lack of empirical evidence to support the concept, it became a powerful tool for mobilising support for quotas in politics at both international and local level (Dahlerup 2010; Freidenvall, Sawyer 2013: 270).

²¹ The counterpart of a village administrator in a town or a city is a chairperson of the board of a town/city district (*przewodniczący rady dzielnicy lub osiedla*). However, there is no official statistical aggregated data on the demographics of chairpersons. However, the data on districts in Krakow (the second biggest city in Poland) may suggest that the proportion

The second enclave of women's public engagement is activity within social movements. After its relative hibernation during communism, the feminist movement has flourished since the early 1990s. One of its current emanations is the Congress of Women, initiated in 2009 as a social movement, operating today as both a social movement and an association. Its aim is "raising consciousness, exchange of information about activities and problems of women in Poland, mutual support, community building, solidarity, formulation of proposals, lobbying and the creation of mechanisms to achieve all of the above" (Congress of Women Guide). Among other women's initiatives was the movement to restore the Alimony Fund, initiated in 2003 in response to the scrapping of the public system which provided benefits for single-parent families when alimony from the other parent was not executed. This started with a few anti-governmental protests, but quickly turned into a country-wide mobilisation. Both initiatives – the Congress of Women and the movement to restore the Alimony Fund – mobilised considerable numbers of – mainly female – activists, captured media attention and the public imagination and gained popular support for their legislative initiatives. These were, in the case of the Congress of Women, the law on quotas on electoral lists, and in the case of the movement to restore the Alimony Fund, the law on the restoration of the Alimony Fund (Korolczuk 2014).²²

Factors of gender equality in public life

It is necessary to explain the considerable discrepancies between the scope and forms of activity of women and men in public life. What are the barriers for gender equality in public life? What are the factors that enhance women's political and civic engagement? Synthesising findings from numerous studies, three general categories of factors influencing the level of gender equality in public life can be recognised. These are social-structural, cultural and political (or legal-institutional) factors.²³

of female chairs is lower. In October 2014, there was only one woman among 18 chairs in the city of Krakow (own calculations on the basis of information available on the official websites of districts in Krakow).

²² Among many other forms of women's organisations (both feminist and without feminist self-definition, as in the case of the movement to restore the Alimony Fund), another noteworthy initiative is the Childbirth with Dignity Foundation, a non-governmental organisation founded in 1996, aiming at working with pregnant women and the mothers of newborns and toddlers. It initiated public dialogue on the subject of childbirth in Poland and led to rising standards of childbirth in obstetric wards (see: <http://www.rodzicpoludzku.pl/Ogolne/About-us.html>, 19.10.2014)

²³ Psychological factors of women's recruitment to public office can also be recognised, but these will not be discussed as autonomous determinants here.

For a long time, structural factors were believed to be significantly related to the proportion of women active in political life. For example, the percentage of female parliamentarians worldwide was argued to correlate to the level of socioeconomic development. Nowadays, however, it is evident that a high level of socioeconomic development is not necessarily a condition for women's success, since female representations in legislative bodies are greater among some poorer countries (e.g. the Republic of South Africa) than in some wealthier countries (e.g. the USA). Today, therefore, it is argued that improvements in women's educational and professional status serve as *facilitating*, but not necessary, conditions for women's empowerment (Norris, Inglehart 2000, 2008).²⁴ They help to increase the eligibility pool of women, but do not necessarily influence the processes of their recruitment and selection. At the same time, though, the feminisation of poverty – which has a global reach, meaning that “women are more likely to be poor than men in both developed as well as less developed societies” (...) – is argued to be “often related to inadequate participation in civil society and the institutions of government” (Gelb, Palley 2009: xxi).

In opposition to structural agents, cultural factors, including popular attitudes towards men and women in public life, have been proved to universally influence the proportions of women in public life. There is a strong relationship between attitudes towards the statement that “men make better political leaders than women” and the actual proportion of female parliamentarians as well as ministers. Countries with an egalitarian culture have more women in power than those where traditional division of gender roles is more popular (Norris, Inglehart 2000, 2008; Paxton, Kunovich 2003). The common view that men make better political leaders discourages women from engaging in politics, party gate keepers from putting female candidates at the top of electoral lists and the electorate from voting for them.²⁵

Gender stereotypes – including views on men and women in public life – may be reinforced or weakened by the media. There is “evidence that media coverage of candidates focuses on the traits and issues presumed to correspond to the candidate's gender (...)” (Murray, 2010: 11) and uses a gendered framework for covering women candidates, including paying excessive attention to their appearance and family relationship, using their first names rather than surnames, emphasising their “newness” and defining them as more emotional and

²⁴ The UN developed an index of gender-related development, combining indicators of women's literacy, longevity, education, and real GDP per capita.

²⁵ Findings on popular attitudes towards gender equality in public life in Poland will be presented in the next chapter.

less rational than their male opponents (Murray 2010). Additionally, there is a vast gender gap in media coverage, which means that women are far less often depicted in TV news programmes, and seldom invited to talk shows (Kucharski 2013). In other words, the media ossify the cultural model of a politician as close to the idea of masculinity. However, there is also some evidence that “(...) exposure to the news media has a significant positive impact on attitudes in each type of society, so that greater exposure to information from the news media is associated with more egalitarian attitudes towards women as leaders” (Norris, Inglehart 2008: 14).

A specific cultural factor is the legacy of communism, understood here firstly as the ideological emphasis on emancipation of women, bringing them into the work force and public life.²⁶ As “the ideological context of the transformations emphasises a drastic, complete break from postwar history” (Titkow 1998: 27), the new leaders and elites in Central and Eastern Europe, including Poland, stressed “not equality and empowerment of women but ‘liberation from work’ and a return to the joys of domesticity” (Moghadam 1997: 146). Creating special programmes for women (e.g. introducing a quota system on electoral lists, creating special agencies responsible for women’s rights) was perceived as reminiscent of communist times and a violation of the democratic principles of liberty and equality, rather than a democratic standard.

The second aspect of the gendered legacy of communism was the limited possibility of organising outside official channels of public participation, which meant that independent women’s organisations were banned and the ones that existed were parts of the communist parties’ apparatus (Waylen 1994).²⁷ Simultaneously, Western feminism was condemned and labelled as a bourgeois ideology (Miroiu 2007).²⁸ As a result, Poland entered the democratic transformation with underdeveloped feminist culture, movement, and discourse, which – according to Galligan and Clavero (2008: 169), who interviewed female parliamentarians from Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia – “robs elite

²⁶ However, whereas the level of women’s employment rose visibly during communism, their participation in political and public life was limited. The considerable proportions of women in legislative organs, which were a democratic façade, were contrasted with the almost total absence of women in the top management of communist parties, which held the real power at these times in Central and Eastern European countries.

²⁷ The only official women’s organisation in Poland was the Women’s League (Fuszara 1997; Einhorn, Sever 2003).

²⁸ After the collapse of communism, women in the region remained largely critical of Western feminism (for explanations see Einhorn, Sever 2003).

political women of arguments that could directly challenge the male-gendered world of politics and provide space for the articulation of women's interests in the political sphere".

Another cultural factor influencing women's chances of entering public life is the pattern of division of home duties between women and men. Emancipation of women during communism did not go in hand with relief from home duties. As a result, women were expected to be full-time workers and to bear the main responsibility for domestic duties and childrearing. This pattern of women's "double burden", or "triple burden" in the case of female public activists, has survived until today, as confirmed by research on women active in Polish local politics (Fuszara 2010).²⁹

Among other cultural factors influencing women's access to public life, especially politics, the role of religious traditions is discussed. It has been argued that while ideological legacy linked with the dominance of Protestantism facilitates the rise of gender-equality beliefs and women's political empowerment, the traditions of Islam have the opposite effect. Traditionally Catholic societies tend to have fewer female politicians than traditionally Protestant ones, and more than those with a dominance of Islam (Inglehart, Norris 2003; Alexander, Welzel 2011).

Last but not least, women's participation in institutionalised politics can be influenced by the level and patterns of women's mobilisation in civil society. It is argued that the absence of feminist discourse together with the lack of women's mobilisation around feminist aims was another cultural factor responsible for the low number of female elected politicians in Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of communism. Women's grassroots groups focused on welfare and social services – considerably reduced by the incoming liberal regimes – rather than on their empowerment and emancipation as an oppressed group (Einhorn, Sever 2003; Galligan, Clavero 2008). Yet the picture is not as unambiguous as it may seem. The debate on abortion and the abortion ban, influenced considerably by the Catholic Church and right-wing parties, was conducive to the activation of women's organisations and the women's movement in the early 1990s in Poland. They were acting in defence of women's rights, including equality in political life; however, their impact on the government's policy had for a long time been problematic (Einhorn, Sever 2003).

²⁹ This has been confirmed to be a universal phenomenon, and is claimed to be responsible for overrepresentation of single women among female parliamentarians and for the fact that women start political careers at a later age than men (quoted in Fuszara 2010).

Much has been written on the influence of political factors on the public – mainly political – representation of women. Among them, it is argued that the pattern of the electoral system is decisive. In advanced industrial democracies, women fare better in various types of proportional representation (PR) systems than under majoritarian rules (Norris, Inglehart 2002; Matland, Montgomery 2003; Paxton, Hughes 2007). As far as post-communist European democracies are concerned, it has been confirmed that “women do better in systems that are pure proportional representation systems than in mixed systems where some seats are based on single member districts and others based on PR lists”. The effect of the electoral system, however, is not as strong as in Western democracies (Matland 2003: 331).³⁰

Another institutional factor of women’s legislative representation is the quota system. Legislated quota systems defining the minimum proportion of representatives of both sexes, with “placement mandates” which regulate the alternative rank order of female and male candidates on party lists (“zippering”), combined with sanctions for non-compliance and monitoring by independent bodies, are claimed to facilitate women’s presence in legislative bodies (Barburska 2002; Norris 2006; Norris, Inglehart 2000, 2008; Siemieńska 1997). Including the provision on the alternative rank order of women and men proves to be important, as in proportional electoral systems with party lists, voters are more likely to choose candidates from top positions than those from further down the list, especially when voters are not very familiar with candidates and there are many parties and many candidates competing (Kunovich 2003). In this context, the Polish case is instructive: at the 2011 parliamentary election (when the 35% quota was in force for the first time), there were around 40% of female candidates, but while they were placed further down the lists or at the top of lists in districts where a given party had a lower chance of winning, women constituted only 24% of elected parliamentarians (cf. Prof. Środa: to męski układ 2011; Kobiety na listach ... 2011).³¹

While legal quotas reflect state-led policies to ensure gender equality in the political realm, voluntary party quotas entail commitments by individual political parties which aim to

³⁰ Why should PR systems be more woman-friendly than other systems? It is mainly because such systems have higher district magnitudes referring to the number of seats per district. “When the district magnitude is one, as in majoritarian systems, each party can win, at most, one seat in a district (...). When district magnitude increases, the chances that a party will win several seats in the district increases. When a party expects to win several seats, party leaders are much more conscious of trying to balance their tickets. Gatekeepers will divide winning slots on the party list among various internal party interests”, including women’s interests (Matland, Montgomery 2003: 27).

³¹ In the previous 2007 parliamentary election women constituted 23% of candidates and 20% of elected parliamentarians.

include a specific proportion of female candidates on their electoral lists. These can also be conducive to the rise of the proportion of female legislators, providing that they are adopted by many and/or large parties, call for a relatively high proportion of women to be nominated as party candidates and contain provisions related to the placement of candidates on party lists. They should also be framed in ways that link them to well-understood and widely accepted cultural practices and traditions and are enforced by internal party bodies (Norris, Krook 2011). Before the 2001 parliamentary election in Poland, three political parties – including the victorious Democratic Left Alliance (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej, SLD) – voluntarily adopted 30% quotas on their electoral lists, which contributed to the growth of the proportion of female parliamentarians from 13% to 20%.

Party procedures of selection and nomination of candidates also become a significant factor of women's political participation. It is assumed that the bureaucratic formula of candidates' selection within parties, based on clear, standardised and properly observed rules as well as nomination decisions made at centralised level, is more "women-friendly" than patronage-oriented selection (meaning that the top party leadership personally hand-picks a shortlist of loyal supporters as candidates) and nomination decisions made at local level (Matland, Montgomery 2003; Norris, Krook 2011). As far as the procedures adopted by political parties in Poland are concerned, it is admitted that the rules of candidates' selection remain highly unclear (Fuszara 2012). However, there is some evidence that the top positions on electoral lists to the local councils are arranged autonomously by the party leaders, which often means shunting female candidates, including popular ones, down the lists (Fuszara 2010).³²

As far as other aspects of intra-party regulations on candidates' selection and nomination are concerned, it is pointed out that "political party laws which require electoral candidates to submit a large monetary deposit can deter female candidates from running, particularly in countries where there are large disparities in the average wages earned by women and men. (...) Similarly, provisions requiring candidates to collect a large number of signatures to signify 'minimum support' can act against women, especially where female candidates have not developed strong networks of established supporters and allies" (Norris,

³² Therefore, there are more female councillors in small gminas up to 20000 inhabitants, where political parties seem to be less influential than associations, local organisations and civic committees, than in bigger units of local government (cf. Regulska 1998; Kandydatki 2011).

Krook 2011: 27). Equally disadvantageous for women may be the tendency to secure key positions on electoral lists for incumbents, because of their established party loyalty and expected popular support (Kunovich 2003: 278).

Once nominated, women can still be treated unfavourably by their political parties during the electoral campaigns. Analyses of consecutive campaigns preceding parliamentary and local elections in Poland provide evidence that, in comparison to men, female candidates were less often present on posters and in TV broadcasts, their statements were shorter and the limits for their expenses on the campaign were lower. Additionally, there were cases of not inviting female candidates to the party pre-electoral meetings, which meant a wasted chance for self-presentation (Fuszara 2010, 2012).

Among other political factors influencing women's political participation, the role of party ideology is discussed. As left-oriented political parties are assumed to adhere more to egalitarian ideals and to be more inclined to support underrepresented groups, they are expected to have more female representatives than rightist parties. According to Christmas-Best and Kjær, the success of the left-wing party is "the strongest predictor of women's level of inclusion in a political elite" (quoted in Kuklys 2008: 13). Political parties with leftist values are also more likely to adopt gender quotas (Krook, Childs 2010). However, long-established leftist parties that emerged from labour movements are dominated by men who often have traditional views on women's roles. Therefore, it has additionally been argued that women do best in New Left parties with post-materialist values (quoted in Matland, Montgomery 2003). The Polish case both confirms and disproves these assumptions. While the increase of female MPs in 2001 was mainly due to the victory of the left-wing SLD, complying with the 30% quota, women not only maintained these gains in consecutive elections won by right-wing and centre-right parties but also increased their proportion in 2011, due to the introduction of legislated 35% quotas and the biggest proportion of female MPs introduced by the winning centre-right PO.³³

Last but not least, it has been observed that in many countries women's sections within political parties have come to serve as an important platform for "mobilizing around women's issues and in gaining commitments from party leaders for the increased recruitment of female

³³ In the 2007 parliamentary election – before the legislated quota system was introduced – PO applied the rule of including at least one woman within the three top places and at least two women within the five top places on party lists (Druciarek, Fuszara, Niżyńska, Zbieranek 2012).

candidates” (Norris, Krook 2011: 47; see also Clavero, Galligan 2008). In Poland, two out of five political parties with members in the lower chamber of the parliament in autumn 2014 had a women’s section. These were the left-wing SLD and the social-liberal Your Movement (Twój Ruch, TR).³⁴

Various analyses produce evidence that different categories of factors are not alternative or rival explanations of women’s empowerment in public life, but rather there exists an interplay between them. It can be argued that “woman-friendly institutions facilitate higher levels of female representation (...) only if women enjoy some minimum level of cultural standing, possess the qualifications party gatekeepers find attractive, and are sufficiently organised to place pressure on party gatekeepers to nominate women” (Matland, Montgomery 2003: 29). In other words, while structural factors are responsible for the supply side of the recruitment process by influencing the pool of women eligible to be active in public life, and political factors shape the demand side of the process by creating incentives (or blockages) to nominate and select female candidates, cultural factors simultaneously influence both sides of the process. Beliefs about gender roles “may influence women’s decision to run for political office, regardless of their career or levels of education” as well as “the likelihood that voters will accept women as their elected politicians and (...) the likelihood that party elites will select and support female candidates” (Paxton, Kunovich 2003: 103).

According to the holistic model of women’s empowerment across three domains, including public activism, subjective beliefs (e.g. cultural factors) mediate the influence of objective opportunity structures – socio-economic development, state capacities, democratic institutions and institutional variants of democracy – on women’s actual advancement to power. “Women’s empowerment is understood as the outcome of a broader process of human empowerment in which the widening opportunities of rising knowledge societies nurture emancipative beliefs. These beliefs inspire the strategies that foster the empowerment of women” (Alexander, Welzel 2011: 381).³⁵ Therefore, progress in the process of women’s empowerment “requires a systemic extension in women’s opportunity structures

³⁴ Among other indices of the institutional context for practising gender equality in public life are: a special law on equal opportunities for women and men, gender equality national machinery, national programmes concerning implementation of gender equality and temporary special measures which enhance women’s participation in public life. These will not be discussed here.

³⁵ Emancipative beliefs are here understood as those which “denote a belief that emphasizes the equal empowerment of all people to freely actualize their potentials, irrespective of group differences, including those of sex” (Alexander, Welzel 2011: 369). Among these beliefs there are orientations that prioritise gender equality over patriarchy, including rejection of beliefs that men make better political leaders, education is more important for boys and men have more right to a job.

which in turns generates a change in subjective beliefs so that women's empowerment becomes a valued goal" (ibid.).

Poles' attitudes towards gender equality in public life

Since popular attitudes towards gender roles have been proved to have a major influence on the actual level of women's empowerment, including women's access to public life, let us demonstrate selected data on Poles' orientations towards women and men in politics. According to the results of the World Values Study, the popularity of the belief that men make better political leaders than women changed considerably between 1997 and 2012.³⁶ While in 1997 51% of respondents agreed with this statement and 33% disagreed, in 2012 the proportions of answers reversed to 31% and 57% respectively. This change may be interpreted as an indicator of a cultural shift towards expressive values linked with the rise of post-industrial society (Inglehart, Norris, Welzel 2002). Simultaneously, discrepancies between women's and men's beliefs were proved to exist. In each of three consecutive WVS surveys women less often agreed that men make better political leaders, and more often disagreed with this opinion (see Table 6).

Table 6. Men make better political leaders than women

Year of study	Agree ¹ (%)		Disagree ² (%)		Don't know	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
1997	57.1	46.2	32.7	36.5	14.6	17.4
2005	33.3	34.2	45.6	54.8	11.0	11.0
2012	34.9	28.0	51.4	61.3	13.6 ³	10.7 ³
¹ Percentages of "agree strongly" and "agree" combined. ² Percentages of "strongly disagree" and "disagree" combined. ³ Percentages of "don't know" and "no answer" combined. Source: World Values Survey 1981-2014.						

While the opinion that men make better political leaders became less popular, demand for stronger representation of women in public life was gaining new supporters in Poland. Between 1992 and 2013 the proportions of people agreeing that there should be more women in the executive positions of the government, political parties, and state administration rose. The biggest increase concerned the opinion that there should be more female executives in political parties: whereas in 1992 27% of respondents agreed with this statement, in 2013 46% approved it, meaning a rise of 70%. According to the latest data from 2013 around 45% of

³⁶ In earlier waves of the WVS this particular attitude was not measured (cf. <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org>).

Poles agreed that there should be more female executives both in political and social organisations (see Table 7).

Table 7. There should be more female executives

Year of study	% of agreeing that there should be more female executives in:			
	government	political parties	state administration	social organisations
1992	41	27	30	-
1995	40	26	28	-
1997	44	32	36	-
1999	43	35	33	-
2006	50	45	40	-
2013	47	46	42	47
Source: CBOS 2013a.				

We should note that the discrepancies between women's and men's attitudes remained even deeper than in the case of the opinion of whether men make better political leaders. For example, in 2013 57% of women and 37% of men declared that there should be more female executives in government. More women in the executive positions of political parties and state administration were welcomed by 54 and 51% respectively of women and 36 and 31% respectively of men. 54% of women and 40% of men agreed that there should be more women in the authorities of foundations and social organisations. Apart from sex, two other factors that differentiated the attitude towards stronger representation of women in public life were education and political orientation, as this need was more frequently recognised by people with a university diploma and leftist political views than by those with a lower level of education and rightist orientations (CBOS 2013a).

Among the factors responsible for the fact that there are fewer women than men in important public positions, Poles pointed mainly to the overload with home duties (71% in 1997 and 59% in 2013), and – albeit to a lesser degree – male predomination in the public life, which decreases women's chances (36% in 1997 and 43% in 2013). Women's lack of self-confidence as well as lesser interest in public life were recognised as secondary barriers for their public empowerment (pointed by 19-23% of respondents). Lower competences and qualifications among women, as well as their lack of suitability for responsible public functions, were indicated by small proportions of Poles (8% and 7% respectively in 1997 and 3% and 2% in 2013) (CBOS 2013a).

Similarly, opinions on the legal guarantees of the equality of sexes underwent considerable changes; however, this was in the opposite direction to the attitudes towards stronger representation of women in the public realm. While in 1999 63% of respondents declared that legal guarantees of the appropriate number of places on candidates' lists to the parliament and self-government for women was a good idea, in 2010 only 36% found it legitimate (CBOS 1999, 2010).³⁷ The relatively low level of support for legislative quotas in 2010 was incomprehensible, especially as in the same survey 56% of respondents declared that they backed the civic legislative initiative – launched by the Congress of Women – proposing equal proportions of men and women on electoral lists to the Sejm, European Parliament and local government.³⁸ Moreover, in 2013, when the legislative gender quota of 35% was already in force, support for legal guarantees of a minimum number of women on electoral lists was even lower, declared by 32% of respondents (CBOS 2013a)³⁹. The fewest supporters for legislative gender quotas were among men and people with higher education (CBOS 1999, 2013a).

Not surprisingly, another legal guarantee of the equality of sexes, namely legislative quotas reserving for both sexes a specific proportion of seats in the government, state administration and the authorities of important public institutions, was backed by an even smaller proportion of Poles, as in 2006 26% of them found such quotas just (CBOS 2006). Therefore, encouraging women and voluntary party efforts seemed to be believed to be a more effective method of strengthening women's participation in politics than legislative gender quotas on electoral lists. In 2010, while 29% and 14% respectively gave priority to these two soft methods, 10% supported quotas (CBOS 2010).

Summarising the results of the surveys presented above, we can observe that while gender equality in public life – understood as balanced representation of male and female executives – recently gained favour among Poles, taking legal special measures in order to accomplish this was not necessarily perceived as justified. However, the picture is more complex, as attitudes visibly correlated with various socio-demographic characteristics, including, first and foremost, sex.

³⁷ The data from 1999 and 2010 is not fully comparable, however, as the question asked in 2010 was framed differently from that in 1999: "Do you find it just that the law determines the (minimal) percentage of women on electoral lists?" (CBOS 2010).

³⁸ Simultaneously, 64% of respondents believed that securing an appropriate percentage on electoral lists for women would encourage them to participate in politics (CBOS 2010).

³⁹ In the 2013 survey the question from 2010 was repeated (CBOS 2013a).

5. Conclusions

Although much has been done to operationalise gender equality (including gender equality in public life) and to justify its promotion and legal enforcement, the idea itself may still be perceived as an abstract concept with little relation to everyday life and the quality thereof (cf. Krzaklewska 2014). Therefore, it is important to study the links between gender equality – its popular understanding, evaluation, experiencing, and practice – and quality of life in its objective and subjective dimensions. As far as gender equality in public life is concerned, the potential directions of the investigation could include answering the questions of: whether individuals' quality of life correlates with the level of gender equality in public life; whether citizens experience betterment in their private lives when the public sphere becomes increasingly gender-equal; whether women and men think of the gendered dimension of public life, and how they think of it; whether they perceive gender relations in political and civic life as just or unjust; whether they consider gender equality in public life as a necessary factor influencing their everyday choices and practices; what their personal experiences related to gender (in)equality in political and civic life are; how they practise gender equality in public life, including their local communities; whether they are and think they are and can be efficacious in bringing change to public life; and what the similarities and differences in attitudes and experiences of women and men of different classes, ages, places of residence, levels of education, ethnicities, abilities and other characteristics are.

While research has previously taken place on the links between different dimensions of gender equality and quality of life,⁴⁰ little has so far been done to understand the relations between gender equality in public life and the quality of life. This is why the scientific project “Gender Equality and Quality of Life – How Gender Equality Can Contribute to Development in Europe. A Study of Poland and Norway”, which contains the discussed dimension of gender equality, represents a pioneering work in this field. The necessity of looking into the relationship between gender equality in public life and quality of life in Poland becomes apparent due to the significant gender inequalities in the public realm discussed above, as well

⁴⁰ See Krzaklewska (2014) for a review.

as the high level of contesting the idea of political gender equality within both political and popular discourses.

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